

## Key Concept

# LACAN'S CONCEPT OF THE REAL OF JOUISSANCE: CLINICAL ILLUSTRATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

**Frédéric Declercq**

Department of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Consulting, University of Ghent, Belgium

Correspondence: Dr Frédéric Declercq, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Consulting, H. Dunantlaan, 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium E-mail: frederic.declercq@UGent.be

## Abstract

*In his return to Freud, the early Lacan focussed on the symbolic and the imaginary. Reflecting mainly on the symbolic structure of the unconscious, the conversion symptoms and the (phallic) jouissance, his references to their real dimension are few and far between. From seminar XI (1964) onwards, though, the real – and more specifically the real of the drives – is given more attention. It is at this point, when elaborating the real dimension of jouissance, that the concept of the real of the body intervenes. With the real of the body, the accent lies on the cut and alienated relation between the subject and jouissance. At first, this polarisation of the subject and its body serves Lacan's aim of situating the exact place of jouissance. Amongst other things this will enable him to determine the role played by culture and society in the genesis of neuroses. Further, the concept of the real of body has to do with the crucial question of aetiology, since the real of the drives is the cornerstone of psychopathological symptoms. As such, Lacan's notion of the real of the body picks up again and develops the crucial concept of fixation, which Freud left unfinished.*

## Keywords

jouissance; body; aetiology; traversal; primary phantasy; suppression

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## The Ex-timacy of the Body

In the last phase of his theory, Lacan does not stop emphasizing that the real of the body, for example, the somatic source of the drive, is something fundamentally alien to us subjects of the symbolic. We would rather have an ex-timate than an intimate relation to its body. Actually, it occurs to Lacan that ancient, vague ideas about the existence of something like an unconscious emerged from this ex-timate relation. Indeed, both the unconscious and the body are intimate parts of us that are nevertheless totally alien and unknown. Who knows what's happening in his/her own body? Who knows what's happening in his/her own unconscious? (Lacan, 1977, p 6)

If these statements sound slightly philosophical or even surrealistic, they nevertheless remain concrete and clinical to the utmost. No need to turn to psychoanalytical theory, in fact, for plain observation already corroborates them. Little children do indeed touch and look at their genitals, for instance, as if they were some kind of attribute stuck to the rest of their body. They seem to approach their genitals as an outside observer, creating the impression that their genitals aren't an integral part of their person. In this respect, we could also evoke the filmed observations of Jenny Aubry, which show that, when placed in front of a mirror, little children hide their private parts with their hands (Lacan, 1976, p 17). By doing this, they seem to point out that their genitals have a different status from the rest of the body – an Other status that Lacan will write with a capital O in order to stress its otherness. Covering up the genitals conveys the idea that they don't fit in, and even ruin, the feeling of coherent oneness that the reflection in the mirror grants.

The Otherness or strangeness of the body appears very clearly in Freud's case study of Little Hans too. Because of the *jouissance* it generates, his so-called "widdler" is so strange to him that he attributes penises to everything except human beings. He searches for the "widdler" of trains, stools, tables, dogs, horses... Only later on does he wonder whether human beings, like his parents, have one too. Lacan makes a very revealing pun about this. Since the real of the drives are experienced as something alien by the subject, he says that infantile sexuality is not in fact auto-erotic, but *hetero-erotic* [heteros: alien, strange, other] (Lacan, 1985, p 13). And indeed, little children don't know what on earth to do with the *jouissance* that arises from their bodies. Maybe the well-known situation of children attracting their parent's attention to their genitals has to do with this. They try to provoke a discourse. These "exhibitions" can of course be interpreted in several ways, but one thing is certain: they do make parents talk. And the things parents say about it - that "it's dirty", like Hans' mother said, or "it's ok", in any case, function as a kind of instruction manual. Whatever its tenor, a discourse will always give the child an idea of what one does or is supposed to do with *jouissance*.

Incidentally, it looks like the ancient Egyptian theory of hysteria contained a certain intuition that rejoins psychoanalytic insights. The first theory on hysteria appeared as recently as 4000 years ago on a papyrus found in Kahun (Papyrus Ebers, 1937). It explained that hysteria was caused by the migration of the uterus, which was considered to be an independent, autonomous organism within the body. Since the treatment of hysteria aimed at pinning down this versatile organ in its right place, the standard therapy the physician-priests prescribed in those days consisted, logically, in marriage. Adopted by Plato, Hippocrates, Galenus, Paracelsus and so on, this theory was authoritative for centuries. However, like most grotesque theories, it contains some kernels of truth. Firstly, hysteria is considered an eminently sexual problem. Secondly, with its conception of a versatile and heterogeneous organ in relation to the rest of the body, this theory in fact implies the idea of a split within the human being, anticipating Freud's discovery of the unconscious as a kind of intimate stranger within ourselves, part of us and yet unknown. In a mythical, imaginary way, this ancient Egyptian theory says that the subject is not the master in its own house (Freud) or that one has no idea what is happening in one's own body (Lacan).

**The jouissance of the body: "a subject, as such, doesn't have much to do with jouissance" (Lacan, 1998, p 50)**

This leads us to a second Lacanian axiom, namely that the subject and its body don't go very well together. The relation of the subject to its body isn't only opaque. It is menacing as well, for the subject experiences the jouissance that arises from it as an intrusion. Lacan's concepts of the 'subject' and the 'body' build on this as they try to structure clinical material in a new way. They focus the attention on the fact that it *is not the subject who is enjoying: on the contrary, it is the body.*

**Neurosis**

As we shall now see in Freud's published case studies, the subject even has to defend itself against the jouissance coming from its own body. As he tells his father, Hans would very much like to tease horses. He fantasizes about whipping and shouting at a horse from the stables. But as a subject, Hans does not recognize himself in this sadistic jouissance. More than that, he even has to defend himself against it. As he says: "When a cart stands there, I'm *afraid* I shall tease the horses (...)" (Freud, 1978e, pp. 79–81). We can notice an identical gap between jouissance on the one hand and his subjective position on the other with respect to the scopophilic drives. When Hans says "I *have to* look at horses, and then I'm frightened", he complains that he lacks any form of control over "his" jouissance, which just goes its own way (Freud, 1978e, p 29).

As for the Rat-man, he remembers having been under the empire of a burning and tormenting curiosity to see the female body in his childhood years (Freud, 1978f, p 160). The adjectives ‘burning’ and ‘tormenting’ speak for themselves. He also remembers having *suffered* from erections and having complained about it to his mother (*Ibid.*, p 161) The polarization between subject and jouissance manifests itself even more strikingly with respect to his anal-sadistic jouissance. As we know, the latter has to do with the great obsessive fear that a horrible punishment used in the East would strike his father and the woman he’s in love with. The Rat-man is so horrified by the torture he evokes that he isn’t even capable of saying what it is. Once told, with Freud’s help, the Rat-man assures him that these thoughts are entirely foreign and repugnant to him and have passed through his mind with the most extraordinary rapidity. But Freud notices that in his description of the torture, his face took on a very strange composite expression. “I [Freud] could only interpret it as one of horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware.” (*Ibid.*, pp 166–167) In other words, the Rat-man is terrorized by the sadistic jouissance that lives inside of him.

The Wolf-man’s whole personality is destabilized by the anal drive. He had gone from being a very good-natured, tractable, and quiet child to a discontented, irritable, violent child who took offence at every possible occasion, flying into a rage and screaming wildly.

Eventually, Dora’s oral jouissance is so pressing and compelling that she can’t possibly break away from it. Actually, her father had to intervene in order to separate her from her oral drive. “She remembered very well that in her childhood she had been a thumb-sucker. Her father, too, recollected breaking her of the habit after it had persisted into her fourth or fifth year”. (Freud, 1978a, p 51).

These cases clearly point out that it is not the subject who enjoys, but the body: Lacan referred to this as the “jouissance of the body” (Lacan, 1998, *passim*). The subject, on the other hand is merely a “burned hole in the midst of the jungle of the drives” (Lacan, 1966, p 666). With respect to the real of jouissance, the definition of the subject is nothing but a “natural defence” (*Ibid.*).

### **Psychoses and the mirror sign**

Lacan’s conceptualization of the traumatic real of the body also sheds light on the dynamics of psychosis. Let us take the ‘mirror sign’ as an example. The classic psychiatric manuals mention the curious phenomenon that psychotics are sometimes very interested in their reflection in the mirror. They systematically look into the mirror, sometimes for hours. The French psychiatrist Abély was thoroughly interested in this behaviour and gave it a name – the mirror sign (‘le signe du miroir’). He also noticed that this

conduct increases, or appears for the first time, a short time before the delusion breaks out. In other words, the mirror sign seems to announce the breaking out of the psychosis. (Abély, 1930, pp 28–36) Now, the mirror sign shouldn't be confused with depersonalization. In fact, they are opposites, for in depersonalisation the subject panics because he or she doesn't recognize him or herself in the mirror, whereas in the mirror sign the subject does recognize himself or herself and, furthermore, is reassured by the image. In a depersonalization, the reflection provokes severe anxiety. Abély finds out that psychotics turn to the mirror because they feel a perturbation in their body. By looking into the mirror they want to verify that they are still the same. To quote Abély: "The mirror sign is a more or less apprehensive/anxious response to a change the psychotic felt inside of him." (*Ibid.*, p 33). If we read the observations concerning the mirror sign through Lacan's conceptualization of the real of the body, we could advance the hypothesis that the mirror sign indicates an eruption of jouissance. It may be the case that the subject is destabilized by an intrusion of jouissance in the body. Afterwards, the subjects in question are incapable of explaining what happened, except that something took place in their bodies. At the moment itself, they are perplexed and speechless. Lacan teaches us to recognize the real nature of the drive in this stupor or absence of signifiers.

Of course, the relation of the psychotic to his or her body doesn't only shed light on the phenomenon of the mirror sign. In the last stage of his theory, Lacan emphasizes that the experiences of the body are central in the dynamics of psychosis. He draws our attention to some autobiographic events Joyce relates in his "Portrait of the artist as a young man", where a kind of "abandonment of the body" (*abandon du corps*) is visible. For instance, when the protagonist "tells his fingers to hurry up" or when he narrates the beating by the Prefect: "Stephen knelt down quickly pressing his beaten hands to his sides. To think of them beaten and swollen with pain all in a moment made him feel so sorry for them *as if they were not his own but someone else's that he felt sorry for* (Joyce, 1965, p 18, 51). As a matter of fact, the peculiar relation between psychotics and their body has not been unnoticed before Lacan for phenomena similar to this "abandonment of the body" are common in psychosis. Think of Schreber's transformation into a woman, R. Roussel's body shining, Pessoa's ecstasies... . Only, these phenomena were never structured in a convincing way, before Lacan.

With his conceptualization of the real of the body, Lacan stresses the fact that psychosis is essentially a disorder in the field of jouissance. This does not certainly mean that his previous conceptualizations of psychosis, in terms of a regression to the mirror stage and a foreclosure of the Name of the Father, are suddenly erroneous. On the contrary, they remain very pertinent concepts, especially when they are re-arranged around the topic of the jouissance. In connection with this, we think that the most reliable diagnostic

procedure for the detection of psychosis is to search for disturbances in the field of the *jouissance*. Indeed, clinical experiences have taught us that we can't rely on the symbolic or the imaginary, since the unconscious productions of psychotics are atypical. We find the same productions in the unconscious of neuroses. As for speech disturbances, they do not always appear in psychoses. And the foreclosure of the father is not a visible operational phenomenon. One can only observe its effects, and these effects are not typical for psychosis either. Father figures or the absence thereof are found in hysterical fantasies as well as psychotic delusions. A major criterion, however, by means of which neuroses and perversions can be differentiated from psychosis is that in the latter, *jouissance* is not limited by the phallus. On the contrary, it is erratic and spread out all over the body. Moreover, the body is experienced as severely heterogeneous to the psychotic. At least, that's how we can interpret the fact that their body is always intruded by an Other (God, The CIA, radiation...) or that they do not acknowledge as their own the feelings of *jouissance* that arise from their body. They always come from an Other.

At this point, we must insert a short note. We saw that the subject is involved in a defence process against its drives or its body. This defence is structural for neuroses, perversion and psychosis, and happens in the pre-Oedipal phase. In the Oedipal phase, though, the real *jouissance* or the body are integrated in the symbolic order. From then on, the subject's relation to *jouissance* is mediated by the symbolic-imaginary construction Lacan calls the fundamental phantasy (which is constructed with Oedipal signifiers). Once symbolized, the subject can now either enjoy its drives (now that they're symbolized, they aren't traumatic any more) or repress them. In the latter case, the defence against the body has become a symbolic process, since it is put into (symbolically structured) conversion symptoms. However, when the father-function or the Oedipal complex is foreclosed, the primary phantasy that mediates between the subject and his body can never be built. Consequently, the psychotic's body *remains* real. It is the real nature of the body that also explains the radical absence of conversion symptoms in psychosis. When organs or functions are disturbed within psychosis, this disturbance is real. There is nothing to decipher. In these cases, Lacan spoke of psychosomatic phenomena. Typical psychotic malfunctions, like paroxysmal fears, 'passages à l'acte', insomnia, and catatonia can also be ranged under the category of the real. They seem to refer to the subject's defence against the *jouissance* welling up from his or her body. In these cases too, psychotics are not capable of saying what is happening to them, except that they feel some kind of a tension inside that frightens them, keeps them awake or prostrated, or pressing them to "do something." In the best scenario, psychosis evolves into paranoia. Indeed, a delusion is an attempt to give meaning and sense to the erupting *jouissance*.

## The two-fold composition of the symptom

We will now concentrate on the real of the body in relation to neurosis. Lacan's concept of the body also aims at saving the major concept of fixation from oblivion. Ever since the discovery of the unconscious, psychopathological symptoms have been explained on the basis of defence, in which repression plays a prominent role. However, after Freud it was more or less forgotten that repression in itself is a second moment within the causation of pathogenesis. "If what is spoken of as 'repression' is examined more closely, we shall find reason to split the process up into three phases which are easily distinguishable from one another conceptually. The first phase consists in fixation, *which is the precursor and necessary condition of every repression*. The phase of the repression proper – the phase to which psychoanalysis is accustomed to give the most attention – in fact is already a second phase of repression. The third phase is the return of the repressed." (Freud, 1978g, pp 66–67). In other words, we mustn't forget Freud's axiom that symptoms are not only a compromise formation between two contradictory tendencies, but also a locus of jouissance. Indeed, right from the beginning of his practice, Freud noticed a two-fold structure within symptoms: the drive and its psychic representations. In Lacanian terms, one has the real of the drive and the signifiers attached to it. This is very clearly present in Freud's first published case study, on Dora. Actually, Freud must have published this case of all cases in order to stress the importance of the real, drive-related element within the structure of psychopathological symptoms. It did not have any obvious appeal to scientific interest, because what it teaches us about repression doesn't add anything new to what Freud said in his earlier papers on the psychoneuroses of defence (1894, 1896).

So, Freud can break Dora's conversion symptoms down into two parts: a symbolic one, that is, the repressed signifiers or psychical representations of the drive; and a real one, related to the drive itself, in this case the oral one. Freud finds this hybrid composition of the symptom in all his later case studies. The obsessions of the Rat-man go back to the oral and anal drive; Little Hans's phobia is built upon the oral, anal, scotophilic and genital drives; with the exception of the genital drive, the same holds for the Wolf-man's phobia, obsessional neurosis and conversion symptoms.

## The real of the body and fixation

Let us now take a closer look at fixation as such. Freud always emphasized the fact that whereas repression is a psychological act, related to the subject, fixation is not. Moreover, repression involves no relation to sexuality as such. Only the psychical representatives, or signifiers, connected to the drives can be

repressed. The drives as such can never be repressed. (Freud, 1978h, vol 14, pp 141–159).

Thus, if repression is a psychological process triggered by the subject, we're left wondering as to which agency is responsible for the fixation of the drives. How come some drives are fixated and others are not? How come the Rat-man's anal drive was fixated and not his oral drive? How come it was Dora's oral drive and not her anal one? So if it is not the subject that decides about the fixation of the drives, who or what does, then? Whereas repression is an *active* act, executed by the subject, fixation appears as a *passive lagging behind*, according to Freud. He clarifies this 'lagging behind' by comparing it with an anthropological comparison: "When, as often happened at early periods of human history, a whole people left their place of domicile and sought a new one, we may be certain that the whole of them did not arrive at the new location. Apart from other losses, it must regularly have happened that small groups or bands of the migrants halted on the way and settled at these stopping places while the main body went further" (Freud, 1978i, vol 16, p 339). Still, this doesn't explain why small groups decided to stay behind. Lacan's answer to that is that they did so because there was a *jouissance* involved in these stopping places. And the *jouissance* in question isn't the subject's – we saw that Freud was categorical about this – but the body's.

In fact, this Lacanian thesis has Freudian precursors, although these only become visible and intelligible after Lacan shed light on them and developed them further. Freud already discovered that the body is an entity that *sexualizes non-sexual processes*. Freud is very clear about this: "(...) there are present in the organism contrivances which bring it about that in the case of a great number of internal processes sexual excitation arises as a concomitant effect, as soon as the intensity of those processes passes beyond certain quantitative limits. What we have called the component instincts of sexuality are either derived directly from these internal sources or are composed of elements both from those sources and from the erotogenic zones. *It may well be that nothing of considerable importance can occur in the organism without contributing some component to the excitation of the sexual instinct.*" (Freud, 1978b, vol 7, pp 204–205). Dora's cough, for instance, was at first an organically determined irritation of the throat. However, the oral drive got mixed in to this irritation and charged it with *jouissance*. Consequently, the organic cough isn't just an organic event anymore, but a sexual one. In the same manner, the body sexualizes constipations (as in the case of the Little Hans), worms and intestinal catarrhs (like in the case of the Rat-man): "Intestinal catarrhs at the tenderest age make children 'nervy', as people say, and in cases of later neurotic illness they have a determining influence on the symptoms in which the neuroses is expressed, and they put at its disposal the whole range of intestinal disturbances." (Freud, 1978b, vol 7, p 186)

## Fixation and the “formal envelope” of neuroses

Lacan takes this activity of the body a decisive step further. According to him, it is the very same agency of the real of the body that also decides *which specific master signifiers will condition a neurosis*. In psychoanalytic practice we are accustomed to take into account the signifiers that constitute the symptoms or the neurosis in general. But this doesn't resolve the questions about the aetiology of pathogenesis. For this to occur, one must also be able to explain why it was those precise master signifiers and not other ones that determined the architecture of the neurosis. In other words, psychoanalysis must be able to give an answer to the question why the signifier ‘rat’, for instance, is so predominant in the Rat-man's neurosis; why it was that signifier and not another that conditioned his neurosis. Why is it the signifier ‘horse’ that gives form to Hans's anxiety? Why did he have a horse-phobia and not another one? True, these signifiers of the Other are the symbolic constellation in which the subject is born and with which he has to constitute himself. However, any clinician knows such signifiers are just a fraction of a subject's symbolic constellation. A case study only tells us about the signifiers that conditioned the neurosis, and leaves aside those that did not contribute to it. We think that it is safe to say that Dora's father cannot be reduced to just one signifier, “catarrh”. The others were left aside since they didn't play any role in Dora's neurosis. A better example is provided by the Rat-man, whose father predicted that he would become “either a great man or a great criminal” (Freud, 1978f, vol 10, p 205). We know from Freud's case study that the signifier ‘criminal’ turned out to be an important pillar in his neuroses. Hence the question that imposes itself is why it was the signifier ‘criminal’ that was held onto instead of “great man”?

In any case, behavioural or systemic explanations are not satisfying. If a signifier was linked to a subject by means of reinforcement or because of the role it played within a system, why does this signifier continue to exert its compelling power on the subject even when these reinforcements or so-called “entropic” powers are not present anymore? How come an individual in adult life repeats his unhappy past instead of leaving it behind?

Freud discovered that specific signifiers are selected because they hook up with the drives that are fixated for those subjects. The signifiers “criminal” and “rat” for instance link up with the Rat-man's oral and anal-sadistic jouissance: “But he himself [The Rat-man] had been just such a nasty, dirty little wretch, who was apt to bite people when he was in a rage.” (Freud, 1978f, vol 10, p 216). As for Little Hans, the signifier ‘horse’ was “selected” because it fit in with his jouissance: “the anxiety originally had no reference at all to horses but was transposed on to them secondarily and had now become fixed upon those elements of the horse complex *which showed themselves well adapted for certain transferences*” (Freud, 1978e, vol 10, p 51). The transferences at stake here are Hans's oral, anal and genital jouissance. The horses that fall down and

make a row with their feet refer to Hans's anal jouissance: when Hans had to be put on the chamber pot and refused to leave off playing, he used to stamp and make a row with his feet in a rage, kick about and sometimes throw himself onto the ground. (*Ibid.*, p. 54) The signifier 'black' (black horses) refers to excrements and the biting refers to his oral and genital drives (*Ibid.*, p 30). For the rest, this is why the symptom has a double composition. The cough and the constipations are both real and symbolic. Dora's cough is a (Oedipal) signifier or conversion symptom as well as a locus of real jouissance. Hans' phobia is a signifier that keeps him away from his real anal-sadistic jouissance, and so on.

Furthermore, Freud noticed the same drive-related mechanism operating in the sexual theories children elaborate. It is not owing to any arbitrary mental or chance impressions that these theories arise, but to the necessities of the child's psychosexual constitution. They appear to be the mere expression of the constellation of their drives. In other words, in children who produce the cloaca-theory, we shall find a fixation of the anal drive; and behind those who produce the oral-theory, an oral one (Freud, 1978d, vol 9, pp 209–226).

Lacan develops these Freudian indications and integrates them into his theory of speech, as well. Since signifiers aren't univocal we are compelled to make constant choices when talking, reading and listening. And everyone knows these choices are tendentious. As the dictum says, we only hear what we want to hear. Let us take Lacan's 'Les Noms du Père' as an example. These signifiers can be understood as 'Les *noms* du père' (the names of the father), and also as 'Les *nons* du père' (the no's of the father) and 'les non-dupes errent' (the non-dupes err). Lacan's thesis advances that the signification the subject will hear/select is dictated by his jouissance.<sup>1</sup> This is also why he states that the fundamental phantasy plays the role of "the signification of truth", which, among other things, means that one only perceives the pieces of reality that fit into one's fundamental phantasy. (Lacan, 1966–1967) In other words, perception, interpretation, memorization, etc., are processes that are highly selective and biased by jouissance. From all this, Lacan concludes that the agency that does the thinking, the computing and the judging is not the ego or the subject, but jouissance (Lacan, 2001, p 551).

### **The treatment of the real kernel: the traversal of the fundamental phantasy**

Let us now put together our findings. Freud discovered that symptoms are the return of repressed signifiers. However, this is only a part of his discovery. As important, if not more so, is that these signifiers are related to drives. In other words, there is always a jouissance implied in the signifiers that were repressed. In fact, jouissance is the cornerstone of neurosis; it constitutes the "first seat of subjective orientation" (Lacan, 1999, p 54). Consequently, it is the real of the drives that is central in what Lacan designates as Freud's testament, "Analysis

terminable and interminable”. When drawing up the balance sheet of the two determining forces of psychopathological symptoms with respect to aetiology and the chances of durable therapeutic effects, Freud, after fifty years of clinical practice, puts repression in perspective and emphasizes the importance of the drive-related factor. Indeed, it is not the resolution of the repressions that is central in this paper, but “the disposal of a conflict between a drive (an instinct) and the subject [ego]” (Freud, 1978k, vol 23, pp. 224–225). What does this entail for analytic treatment? It entails that analysis will have to lay bare the *jouissance* related to each signifier. According to Lacan, this has to do with the fundamental phantasy. Lacan’s merit is to have searched for an answer to the problem of how to deal with the drive-related component of symptoms. His situating of the place the fundamental phantasy occupies within the dynamic of neurosis as well as what he calls its traversal is an answer to the Freudian impasse of the interminable analysis and its residues. According to Lacan, the totality of a neurosis converges in the fundamental phantasy, since it is the agency that plays the central role in libidinal economy. As he describes it, primary phantasy is the agency that regulates and conducts everything that has to do with *jouissance*. And as we saw, symptoms do not only come down to signifiers but to a mode of *jouissance* as well. This laying bare of the drive-related aspect of symptoms passes via what Lacan calls the traversal (or crossing) of the fundamental phantasy. Once the analysis of the fundamental phantasy has revealed which enjoyment is enacted in his symptom(s), the analysand will be in the a position possibility to undertake a revision of his position towards it for as long as he doesn’t know which *jouissance* he and his symptom are connected with, his discordant relation to it couldn’t possibly be modified. Ultimately, the conclusion of analysis thus revolves around the *jouissance*. Let us note in passing that the drives that once were fixated by the body could not be changed any more, be it by an analysis or something else: obviously the decisions of the body are irreversible. However this is not the case for the positions of the subject towards the drive processes. These ones *can* be revised.

### **Jouissance, culture and society**

The structural heterogeneous relation between the subject and “his” *jouissance* puts a different complexion on the matter of the role played by culture and society in our sexual enjoyment and the causation of neurosis. Early in his career as a psychiatrist in Victorian Vienna, Freud initially thought that the suppressive morale was responsible for repression. At one time, for instance, he believed that a less suppressive and psychoanalytically enlightened approach to child-raising would prevent neurosis and enable man to enjoy his sexual drives to the fullest. After 30 years, later, in his article on sexual enlightenment he admitted he was wrong: “I am far from maintaining that this [sexual

enlightenment] is a harmful or unnecessary thing to do, but it is clear that the prophylactic effect of this liberal measure has been greatly overestimated” (Freud, 1978c, p 234). Indeed, educated by his clinical practice Freud comes to realize that ultimately the true barriers separating the subject and his drives are not imposed by society. There must thus be another mechanism responsible for the fact that the subject doesn’t fully enjoy his sexuality. Discussing this topic in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud will note that “sometimes one seems to perceive that it is not only the pressure of civilisation but something in the nature of the function itself which denies us full satisfaction and urges us along other paths”. (Freud, 1978j, p 105). Freud thus realized that there was something inherently problematic to sexuality, also witness for instance his permanent and unresolved struggle with the notion of sexual pleasure (Lust). According to Lacan, sexuality is an intra-subjective difficulty that is only afterwards projected onto the familial, cultural and societal suppressions. In the final analysis, it appears that the suppressions only mask and rationalize the primary and structural heterogeneous relation of the subject towards his drives. “The sexual impasse exudes the fictions that rationalise the impossible within which it originates”. “Even if the memories of familial suppressions weren’t true, they would have to be invented, and that is certainly done. That’s what myth is, the attempt to give an epic form to what is operative through the structure” (Lacan, 1990, p 30). In other words, repression comes first and suppression second (*ibid.* p 28). Indeed psychoanalytical practise demonstrates that the unconscious just creates suppressions when they are lacking. Witness the typical hysterical flight [dérobade] when all of sudden jouissance becomes accessible and the characteristically inextricable labyrinths the unconscious of the obsessive subject creates between him/herself and the object of his jouissance. We don’t want to pretend suppression hasn’t any negative effects on jouissance whatsoever. What we do mean to say is that suppression as such cannot generate neurosis. Therefore, it must lean on anterior repressions. In other words, if neurosis is related to suppression it is because the latter interacted with repression.

Of course, all types of societies and cultures aren’t identical. Fortunately, some of them are more permissive and less obscurantist than others. Nevertheless, the path to optimal libidinal satisfaction couldn’t be paved by society or culture alone. It requires the overcoming of the repressions, *casu quo* the traversal of the fundamental phantasy as well. In line with this, Lacan hoped that analytic discourse would manage to create an entirely new social bond that would reorient a culture’s and society’s relationship to sexuality (Lacan, 1990, *passim*). Naturally, this requires a type of society or culture within which the analytic discourse can function. As we know from the cover of the *Écrits* (which Lacan wrote himself) (Lacan, 1971), his major reference on that matter was the Enlightenment. Apparently, Lacan had in mind a society or culture that would revolve around truth. In other words, a society or culture that wouldn’t lean on

myths and fictions that mask and rationalize the structural absence of a sexual relation. By laying bare the very nature of *jouissance* from the start, this kind of society would dispense with the need for its individuals to become alienated in all kinds of deceitful fictions.

## To Conclude

In the last phase of his teaching, Lacan's major preoccupation is with the field of *jouissance*. In developing a notion of the real dimension of the body, Lacan stresses the cut between the subject and its *jouissance*. At first, Lacan shows us that, in the end, the subject does not have very much to do with *jouissance*. The agency that is concerned with *jouissance*, on the other hand, is the body. This situating of *jouissance* sheds new light on the dynamics and the treatment of neurosis and psychosis. Taking up Freud's indications on this matter, Lacan points out that the real of the body is the agency that lies at the base of the fixation of the drives, which is the precursor to repression. Thinking the real of the body through to its logical conclusion, Lacan arrives at the conclusion that it is this same agency that chooses the signifiers that a neurosis is built with. Since *jouissance* is considered to be the cornerstone of psychopathological processes, ultimately the concept of the real of the body ties together aetiology and treatment.

## About the author

Dr F Declercq is Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychoanalysis and Clinical consulting at the University of Ghent. He teaches courses on Psychodiagnostics, Sexuality and sexual disturbances and Models in Psychoanalysis from a Freudian Lacanian point of View. His research interests are Lacan's return to Freud as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorders from a Freudian-Lacanian framework. He is a forensic expert at the Court of First Instance and the magistrate's court. Psychopathy is also one of his research areas. He is a psychoanalyst in private practice.

## Notes

- 1 Since it contains homophonies based on nothing less than nineteen different languages, Joyce's 'Finnegans Wake' could serve as an accurate diagnostic instrument. Indeed, the significations a subject would select from it would certainly reveal his *jouissance*.

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